

DUXBURY BEACH

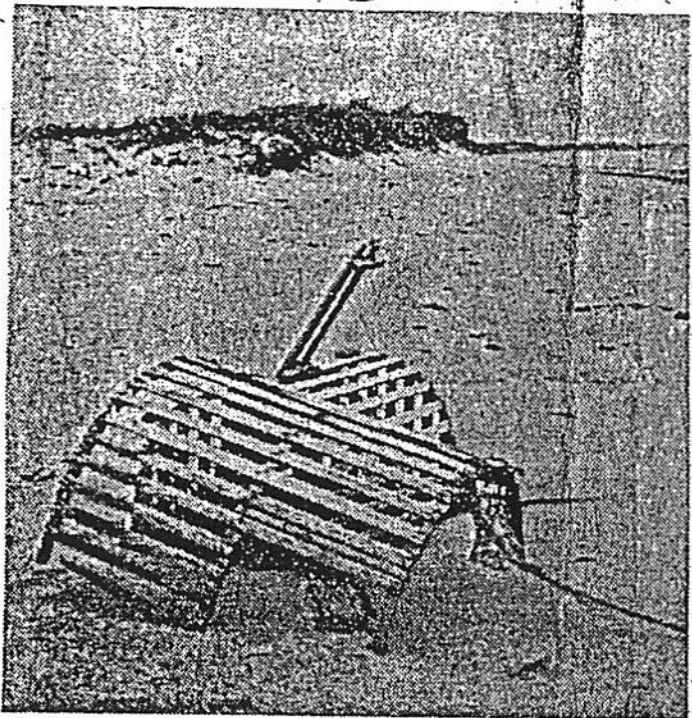
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1954

Boston Globe

DIR 6:11 5

Afoot on the South Shore With Willard de Lue—XII

Few Things Lonelier Than Empty Beach



MUTE TESTIMONY of loneliness on a deserted beach in Duxbury.



GREEN HARBOR, Marshfield — There can be few things lonelier than an empty beach in a dull Winter day—and empty indeed was the beach I walked as I came into Marshfield along the Duxbury ocean-shore.

The beach there is a six-mile sandspit, standing offshore like a great jetty and sheltering the inner bay. I had got out to it by a long bridge from Powder Point, its only direct connection with

better footing. Behind me—that is, south from the bridge—Duxbury Beach is free of houses, but here at the north, cottages begin to appear in less than a mile . . . and there is an even nearer outpost building, which I've since been told is a privately owned but public bathhouse.

Now my map showed me that from the bathhouse a road goes up the dunes to Green Harbor; but I held to the beach, and shortly was walking in front of little camps and cottages whose numbers gradually increased until there was a close-set colony of them—every one empty and shuttered tight.

About where the first cottages were, I noticed a few little cedars growing on the dunes . . . reminders of a time when the miles and miles of this narrow sandspit bore many of their kind, and of good size.

It is related that Eliphas Weston of Powder Point, father of the famous Ezra Weston Sr., the shipbuilder-merchant "King Caesar," was drowned in 1778 when ferrying a boatload of cedar boat-timbers from the beach to the Point.

(It is also of record that in the middle 1700's both Duxbury and Marshfield forbade pasturing cattle on the beaches because they were eating and destroying the grass that then, as now, helps anchor the windswept and sea-torn dunes.)

Up beyond the clustered cottages—up along past the Mae Roberta, the Jay Dee, the Logans, Camp Ella and Weymouth Lodge and all the others, I came to a wooded nubble or hummock. It is, I suppose, the historic Rouse's Hummock, owned back in the 1600's by pioneer Marshfieldman John Rouse.

ridge stands between the road and the beach; and the Ross's place is there, and squirrels are gambolling by the Thompson and Holmes houses among the trees. The trees were oaks. Crisp dead leaves rattled in their branches.

And so it was that I came into Canal st., and so into Green Harbor and into Marshfield town.

And just about there, if old mapmakers can be believed, I crossed what had been the old Green Harbor entrance. Canal-diggers and the sea joined in closing it and later on, fishermen, working stealthily by night, opened another harbormouth upshore. But that is another story.

NEXT—Green Harbor Beach

In Summer there would have been children and grownups fishing from the long bridge; and at its ocean end would have been parked cars, a throng of bathers, bright umbrellas on the sands.

Today there was nothing—nothing on the bridge; nothing that I could see as I looked south four miles to the light-tower and houses in pale silhouette on the Gurnet head; nothing to northward, where the nearer cottages of Green Harbor and Brant Rock made only a long conglomerate of blacks and grays against a glowering sky.

The sun, so bright in the morning, now filtered its light through gathering cloud and bathed the sea and shore in an eerie light. The ocean was a cold, slate-green. And the low dunes behind the sloping sand bore their most bedraggled look—ragged in outline, their bleached tresses of beach-grass set all awry by the tearing Winter winds.

Nowhere was there a sign of life. Not a person that I could see, not a car. Not even a gull.

There had been one lone gull—back on Powder Point beach, near the bridge. His kith and kin probably were gathered in more sheltered waters.

But that anti-social chap (though I suppose it's scarcely right to single one specimen from the whole anti-social clan; they don't even get along among themselves, and none I've ever met made the slightest response to my own friendly advances)—that lone gull just stood there and looked me over unfalteringly with an icy eye.

He just outstared me; and I was reminded of a time on a great liner bound home from England, when a friend with whom I stood spoke a casual word to a stranger in the lounge. The stranger—impeccably dressed in tails—looked my friend over from head to toe, stared him in the eye, with an expression of amazement, and turned his back.

They hadn't been introduced, you know!

So perhaps the gulls aren't so bad, after all.

Today the wind was hard out of the west, and cold, so I walked close to the edge of an almost surflless sea, where I was in the shelter of the dunes and also had

had a struggle with it, as it appears on a 1795 map as a "hom-mak," and in one of 1833 as a "hummock."

It is a rounded mound rising about 30 feet above the sea, and its ocean side has been worn away until it makes a little bluff above the beach. A concrete seawall now is being built to protect it; I found a couple of men at work tearing down the forms of a recently-poured section.

"Sure needed it," said one, looking at the eroded hummock.

Here at The Hummock a celebrated event took place in 1869—the landing of the French cable, the third permanently successful Atlantic cable and the first linking the United States with France. It ran by way of St. Pierre Island, off the Newfoundland coast.

Cheering crowds were on the beach as the cable came ashore, and later there was a big celebration in Duxbury town, with a banquet served to 600 persons on Abram's Hill, near the foot of Powder Point.

I went in now among the little cottages, peered into Ford's empty store and then, getting out onto the road, continued along toward Green Harbor.

The road here curves around the west base of the hummock, which bears some big trees on its west slope. Extending off from the landward side of the road are the vast Duxbury-Marshfield marshes. They run back two miles into the land, and are cut by innumerable tidal streams—white, frozen rivers they were today, winding crazily in the sweeping expanse of dun-colored and matted grass.

This was still Duxbury—Duxbury afloat, for the narrow strip of dry land with sea in front and soggy marsh in back, is an island.

And it was Duxbury, too, as I went along for yet another half-mile past the backs of many a fine beach-front home—the Tougas's place, the little Gurnet Inn, which is to be open this season I'm told; Leonard, Coleman, Connolly, McAloon, Carroll, Dunn (a Scandinavian settlement)—sign after sign, but never a sign of life.

Now I came to where a wooded

G
ci
to
ap
ag
fo

E

BEACH